

ANIMALS ILLUSTRATED

Raven

by Monica Ittusardjuat • illustrated by Kagan McLeod





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Note to Readers: For Inuktitut-language resources, including pronunciation assistance for Inuktitut terms found in this book, please visit inhabitmedia.com/inuitnipingit

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The Raven

Ravens are commonly found across the Arctic and beyond. Their range in North America stretches east to west from Alaska to Newfoundland and Labrador and south to the US border in some areas. They are also found in many other areas of the world. Ravens are large, dark birds that are in the same family as crows and jays. They are bigger than crows and have larger beaks. They have shaggy black feathers that shimmer in the light to look blue or purple at times.

The wingspan of a raven, which is the distance from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other, is about 4 feet (1.3 metres), and their length from head to tail is about 26 inches (about 66 cm).

Let's learn more about ravens!



Range

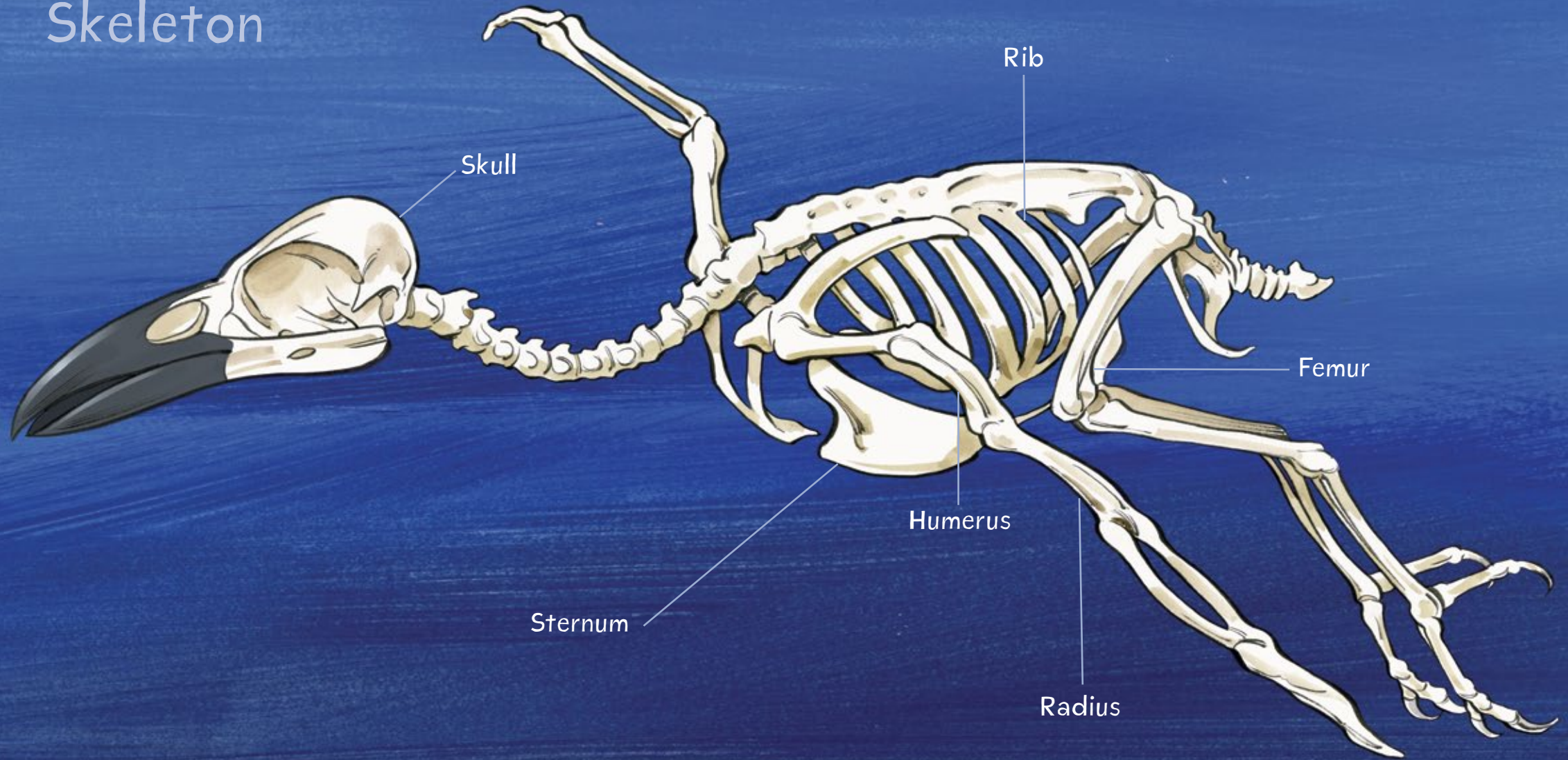
Ravens are found all over the Northern Hemisphere, that is the part of the globe that sits above the equator. In Canada, their range can stretch as far south as the US border in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, but they are most common in the Canadian Arctic.

In Nunavut, ravens are mostly spotted around communities, even in the wintertime. In the past, they were more common in mountainous areas, but now their preferred home is in human communities, where they can find food easily.

Ravens usually prefer to live separately, with just two mates living together in a defined territory that they protect from other ravens, but they can be found in larger numbers in places where there is a good food source. Many of them gather together at places like dumps, where there is lots of garbage to pick through.



Skeleton





Beak

The large, strong beak of the raven is used for many purposes. Raven eggs and babies can be hunted by other birds, foxes, and wolves. Adult ravens will peck at predators with their sharp beaks, which are capable of drawing blood, to defend their nests.

Ravens also use their beaks to rip open objects to help them find food. They have been known to destroy boxes and bags to get at what they want. They can also use their beaks to hold tools, such as sticks, to help them find food.



Raven Wingspan

Wings

Ravens are the largest birds in their family, which includes crows, jays, and magpies. They have the longest wingspan of any of these birds.

They are very agile flyers and can soar, swoop, spin, and dive in the sky like an acrobat. They can even fly upside down on a windy day!

The bones of a raven's wing have the same names as human arm bones, such as the humerus, the radius, and the ulna. In humans, those are the names for the upper arm bones and parts of the forearm.

Diet

Ravens are omnivores, which means they will eat both plants and animals.



Arctic Char



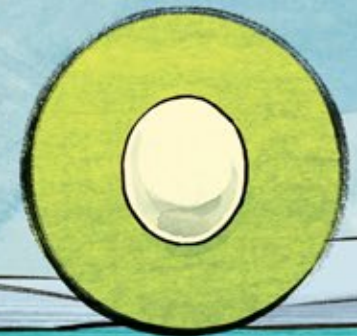
Black Fly



Bread



Lemming



Egg



Ravens will eat anything! This includes berries, insects, eggs, lemmings, bread or bannock, fish, any dead animal, and even other animals' poop!

In addition to gathering at the dump to find food, ravens will gather in large numbers around an animal carcass, the remains of a dead animal.

Babies

Ravens build their nests in high places, like cliffs and power line towers. They can be seen roosting in groups on power lines and telephone poles.

Ravens mate for life, which means the same two ravens will nest together and produce eggs year after year. They use the same nest every year, adding new sticks, roots, and grasses each year.

A mother raven lays between four and seven eggs each year. Eggs are usually laid in the wintertime, between February and April. Baby ravens stay in the nest for five to six weeks. A raven that is still in the nest is called a “nestling.”



Communication

Ravens are very intelligent birds and have many ways to communicate.

They croak, gurgle, and caw. Ravens have been recorded making more than thirty different sounds. They can even imitate human words.

Ravens also communicate through their bodies. Males will use flying displays to impress females. They can use their beaks, wings, and hackles—the feathers along their necks—to communicate with other ravens.

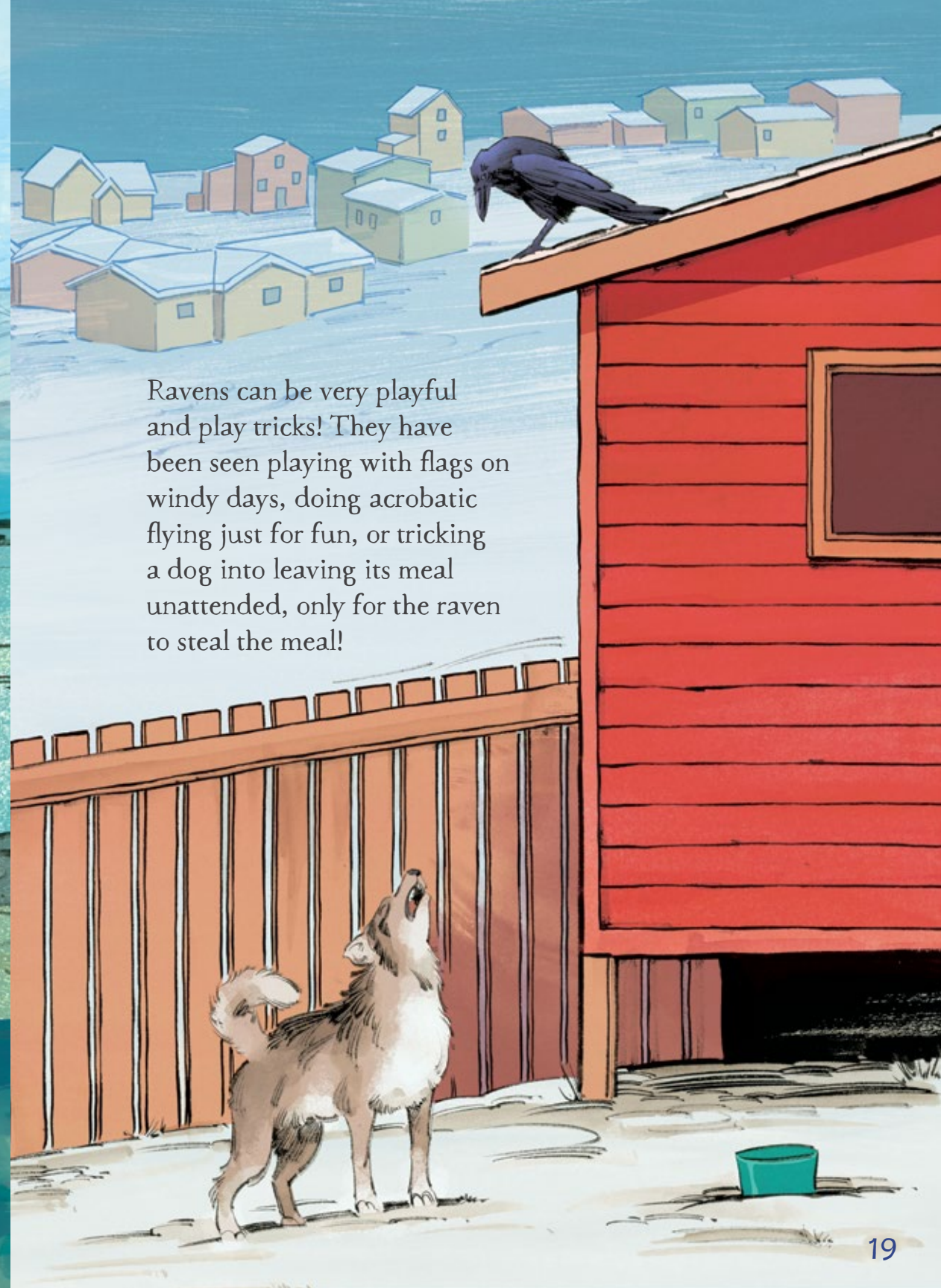


It is also said that when a raven sees a hunter on a dog sled, they will show the hunter where there are caribou.



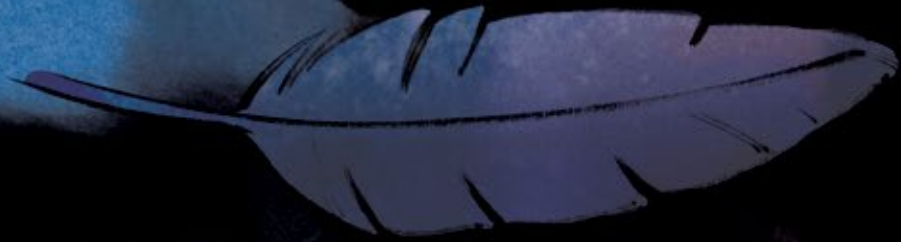
Fun Facts

For the size of their bodies, ravens have one of the biggest brains of any bird. They can learn to problem solve and use simple tools.



Ravens can be very playful and play tricks! They have been seen playing with flags on windy days, doing acrobatic flying just for fun, or tricking a dog into leaving its meal unattended, only for the raven to steal the meal!

Traditional Uses



Raven Feather


Raven feathers were traditionally used on the ends of arrows. Feathering arrows helps keep them stable in flight.




Ravens appear in many traditional Inuit stories, including the origin story of how the loon and the raven received their feathered coats. The raven was so impatient while the loon tried to paint his beautiful feathers, that the loon ended up spilling the black ink all over the raven, giving the raven its completely black coat.







Monica Ittusardjuat is a residential school survivor who grew up in a time when Inuit lived a subsistence way of life, moving camps and following animals where they were plentiful. Monica has 30 years of experience in education and language studies. She has taught in elementary and high schools, as well as in the Teacher Education Program at Nunavut Arctic College. She also worked at the National Inuit Organization for the unification of the Inuktitut writing system. After trying to retire, Monica started a new career as a Senior Inuktitut Editor, which she says is her “dream job”.



Kagan McLeod has been illustrating for magazines, newspapers, and design firms since 1999, after graduating from Sheridan College’s illustration program. He began work as a staff artist for the National Post newspaper, and has had illustration work published recently in *Entertainment Weekly*, *Reader’s Digest*, *The Walrus*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Toronto Life*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Popular Mechanics*. His first graphic novel, *Infinite Kung-Fu*, was published in 2012. He lives in Toronto with his wife, two daughters, and a hound dog.

